

**AFTER ACTION REPORT  
OPERATION DESERT STORM  
AL DHAFRA AB, UNITED ARAB EMIRATES  
8 MAY 97 - 12 AUG 97**

**Tasking:**

I was identified to fill the Air Mobility Command rotation at Al Dhafra AB, U.A.E. Orders were issued on 18 Apr 97. This was the last 90-day rotation at Al Dhafra. I operated in a one-deep position normally filled by a TSgt or above. I departed Scott AFB on 6 May 97 and arrived on site at Al Dhafra on 8 May 97.

**Responsibilities and Background:**

1. The contracting office at Al Dhafra AB supports the 4413<sup>th</sup> Air Refueling Squadron (Provisional). It is the second busiest location in the Area of Responsibility (AOR). I was responsible for all acquisition support, to include overseeing most of the deliveries made to the site.
2. Until October of 1996, personnel sent TDY to Al Dhafra had been billeted in hotels in downtown Abu Dhabi. All personnel are now billeted in tent city at the base. Because of this, the workload has increased substantially over the last 9 months. Civil Engineering is being tasked to provide more support than they are manned to do. Consequently, more requirements are being contracted out. Force protection requirements have increased to meet higher headquarter inspections. The total body count in camp has increased from what it was three months ago, and the figure will go even higher in the coming months. This increase causes increases in the quality of life requirements provided by the Services personnel.

**Barriers to Contract Support**

1. The biggest obstacle I had to overcome in providing contract support was the time factor. Businesses in the U.A.E. have a different concept of timeliness than we have in the States. I spent a lot of time explaining to my customers why "Existing Stock" items quoted by vendors still took up to a week to supply. "Existing stock" to the vendors meant they had the item somewhere in their inventory, but it might be in Dubai, or one of the other emirates and they would have to make arrangements to have it delivered to their Abu Dhabi location. Vendors would also estimate a delivery time based on when we said we wanted it, not when they could actually provide it. It is just the nature of the culture to do it this way. The other half of the time issue is the hours the vendors are open. Most are open for business from 0800 to 1300, then close until 1630. They re-open at 1630 and are open until 2000/2100 hrs. The 3 ½ hour gap in the middle of the day caused us to lose valuable time because on many occasions it necessitated additional trips back downtown to get the job done.

2. Another barrier was an internal one. I spent a lot of time repeating training to my customers. This was caused by the constant turnover of personnel in the other flights. Just when I got a BPA holder understanding what his/her responsibilities were, they would leave and I would have to start over. Consequently, it was difficult to get the proper documentation needed for my files.
3. On the occasion that I had to go back to the United States to satisfy the requirement, if the item was small enough to ship via APO there was no problem. If the item was too large to ship via APO, there was a problem. Since we had no Status of Force Agreement (SOFA) or Defense Cooperative Agreement (DCA) with the UAE government, goods delivered to us were not automatically exempt from customs fees. Each time an item came through customs, we had to get the Embassy involved in getting it released. This process took over a month each time it occurred. The obvious answer to this was to ship items via the TMO system, but because of the backlog within TMO, it might take months to get the items.
4. Language was not a specific problem because most of the vendors spoke English. Sometimes it was difficult understanding telephone conversations, but face-to-face dealings went well.
5. One item that was a barrier when I first arrived was the rule of two when traveling downtown. The commander's policy was that when traveling off base, there had to be at least two in the group. This policy hindered my ability to operate because the Finance Officer was unable to go downtown in the evenings. He was tasked with providing cashier services to the troops from 1800-2000 hrs every evening except Friday. It was difficult for me to find someone else willing to tag along with me for 4-5 hours while I sourced requirements. I remedied this by asking for and receiving permission from the Commander to travel alone while conducting official business. The commander understood the importance of being able to conduct business while the shops were open and the difficulty I had in complying with the policy. The rule of two waiver applied only when on official business. If I went downtown for pleasure, I had to have a partner.

#### **Problems/Lessons Learned:**

1. Turnover of customers causes loss of continuity and repetitive training by the CO.

**Recommendation:** Make sure the customer flight chiefs identify personnel who can provide the most stability. Ensure all customers receive and understand the training guide provided by the Contracting Officer.

2. Vendors want you to sit down and "socialize" prior to conducting business.

**Recommendation:** Ensure all incoming CCOs understand that local culture requires more than just walking in, buying an item, and leaving. They need to be prepared to sit down and have coffee, tea or cold drink. It is considered rude to turn down the offer. We must remember, "When in Rome..". CCOs need to remember this when budgeting their time.

3. Lack of understanding contract terminology almost created a problem between myself and the commander. She thought that based on my open PR listing that I had over 140 open AF Form 9s. She knew that other sites in the AOR have very few Form 9s each month and she wanted to get me some help. What she didn't understand was that it was 140 line items, not Form 9s. I actually had less than 50 I was working on. The problem occurred when she went up-channel to CENTAF to ask for additional contract support without consulting me first. I heard about it when I was asked by the AOR superintendent what was going on. After sitting down with the Commander, she withdrew her request.

**Recommendation:** Make sure the CCO spends some time with the commander to make sure he/she understands how your system works. Since the Commander I was working with had been here before, I assumed that she understood my job. This was an erroneous assumption and one I'll not make again.

### **Observations and Suggestions for Future CCOs:**

1. The CD-ROM provided to students attending CONS 234 was helpful to me on this deployment. I recommend that a copy be provided at all deployed sites and that updates be made available.
2. It is my understanding that the position at Al Dhafra has been converted to a one year slot for a MSgt. In my opinion, we need to consider sending supplemental assistance to that one-year person. First, it is a very busy location. You can handle 14-16 hour days for 90-120 days. To be that busy for a year will burn the person out. Secondly, the mid-tour break would need to be covered by someone from PSAB or another location. Because it takes weeks to find your way around Abu Dhabi, that individual would be at a disadvantage for the short time they would be there. Customer support will suffer. I think we should consider sending a 5-level, or a 7-level APDP level 1 certified individual along with the one-year position. This could be done on a 120 day or 6 month rotation. This would accomplish 2 things: 1) Provide support to keep the one-year guy sane and increase the level of support to customers, i.e. better BPA training/tracking; and 2) we get more hands-on training to those individuals close to deploying themselves. Top Dollar is a good training tool, but we need to take advantage of other opportunities to get folks experience without putting them in a position to fail. We have 7-level crosstrainees who are very apprehensive about deploying because they meet the line remarks for a one-deep slot, but have never deployed in any contingency environment.
3. CCOs need to remember to take care of themselves. Don't be afraid to ask the commander to change if it helps you to better support your customers. Tell them what you need-they want to help you because then you can better help them.

### **Comments:**

My TDY to Al Dhafra was enjoyable. The personnel were cooperative and I received great support not only from the on-site command section, but also from the AOR Contracting personnel. The hours were long but it was a very rewarding experience. It was gratifying to know that contracting plays such a significant role in deployments. Although I did not accomplish all the goals I set for myself when I got there, I am proud of the work and the personnel I worked with.

MORTON L. GOULD, SSgt, USAF  
Contracting Officer